

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Committee on Government Reform

**"Back to the Drawing Board:
A First Look at Lessons Learned from Katrina"**

Thursday, September 15, 2005
10:00 am



Chief Carlos J. Castillo, Director, Miami-Dade Office of Emergency Management
Robert Parker, Director, Miami-Dade Police Department
Susanne M. Torriente, Assistant County Manager for Public Safety

Introduction

Good morning Mr. Chairman and Members of the House Government Reform Committee. My name is Chief Carlos Castillo, Director of the Miami-Dade County Office of Emergency Management. Thank you for this opportunity to share Miami-Dade County's experience.

I am joined today by Director Robert Parker, Miami-Dade County Police Chief; Assistant County Manager for Public Safety, Susanne M. Torriente; Chief of Staff to Mayor Carlos Alvarez, Denis Morales; and Eric Olafson from the Board of County Commissioners' Office of Intergovernmental Affairs.

Miami-Dade County spans over 2,000 square miles, hosts a major airport, Florida's largest seaport and a nuclear power plant and has a resident population of 2.5 million. The County has identified 18 potential hazard areas that could impact our community at any time. This is why our Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan encompasses an all hazards approach to prepare and protect our community. My comments today will focus on the impact of hurricanes.

Both the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the State of Florida recognize Miami-Dade County as a leader in emergency management, from the unified message delivered by our elected officials to our facility and staff experience. Following Hurricane Katrina's impact, FEMA and state teams from other parts of the country remarked how quickly roads were opened, debris was cleared, power was restored and the preliminary damage assessment process was begun. We've had some practice. Last year, Miami-Dade County activated its Emergency Operations Center (EOC) four times in six weeks for Hurricanes Charley, Frances, Ivan and Jeanne. We have activated for Dennis and Katrina so far this season.

Since 1988, Miami-Dade County has responded together with Fairfax County Fire and Rescue to disasters around the world. Our work with the Federal government to develop the US International Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) response capability was used as the cornerstone for developing FEMA's domestic USAR capability. It was built with input from people like me – practitioners who respond on a daily basis. Miami-Dade has embraced this partnership with the federal government since the early 1990's.

Our foreign and domestic disaster response experiences helped prepare us for Hurricane Andrew in 1992; one of only three Category Five hurricanes to ever hit the US. But there was much to learn.

As a County, we were on our own for what seemed like an eternity. We accepted that this is the reality. We must be prepared to be on our own for the first 24-72 hours following a major hurricane. The fact remains that all disasters are local - and long after resources have left, the disaster remains local. This does not mean that we won't need assistance for an event that may overwhelm local resources.

It is clear that the only way to ensure the prompt, coordinated response our community deserves is to develop preparedness partnerships with governmental agencies, private volunteer organizations, non-profits, and most importantly, our 2.5 million residents. Hurricane preparedness is everyone's responsibility – from individuals locally through all levels of government. Clearly, there are very different capabilities throughout the country. These differences should be considered when the Federal government responds to assist.

What has Miami-Dade County Learned?

Many things went right in Miami-Dade's response to Andrew and we made it a point to build on those successes. We fortified programs that worked and changed or eliminated those that did not. We continue to do so with each emergency exercise or activation.

One of the successes during Hurricane Andrew was the implementation of the Incident Command System. This enabled us to effectively manage the resources we had and were receiving. We continue to train and expand our use of the National Incident Management System, a proven management tool that has been practiced for many years.

It became apparent during Andrew that accurate and timely information flow was not occurring in the manner needed. As a result, Miami-Dade developed the Divisional Emergency Operations Center concept. This divides more than 30 municipalities into a manageable span of control, one of the basic tenets of Incident Management.

One of the hardest lessons learned was our assumption that by not hearing from parts of the county, they had sustained little or no damage. The reality was that the southern end of the county was essentially gone. Out of that came SNAPSHOT, a preliminary damage assessment tool, which provides an immediate, preliminary picture of which areas may be most severely affected, allowing us to mobilize resources and focus on more definitive assessments and needs analyses.

Following Andrew, Miami-Dade County took full advantage of the federal government's mitigation program. We believe this funding source is critical in preventing disasters. To date, the Miami-Dade Local Mitigation Strategy has completed mitigation projects of approximately \$150 million. These include windstorm and flood abatement projects located throughout the county. Following Katrina, which dumped up to 20 inches of rain throughout the county, areas that flooded for days in the past were essentially dry in less than 24 hours. Our Local Mitigation Strategy is used by FEMA and the State of Florida as a model program. Mitigation works.

Without a doubt, much will be learned by communities affected by these recent storms, just as we have from Andrew and others since. The Challenge is how to enable areas that have yet to be affected by a major hurricane to learn and improve their capabilities.

Recommendations

Based on our experience internationally, nationally and locally we respectfully offer the following recommendations:

1. An all hazards approach must be utilized in order to be prepared as a nation.
2. A community hit by a major disaster that overwhelms its capabilities will need assistance as soon as possible to begin the damage assessment process, which will lay the foundation for appropriate response and recovery efforts.
3. The National Incident Management System is important and must be utilized to manage assets, both locally and federally, as well as assist in coordinating the humanitarian effort.
4. FEMA must be an active partner with local governments in each aspect of emergency management: preparation, response, mitigation and recovery, as well as training and exercises, while respecting the role and input of local government in disaster response.

Once again, thank you for this opportunity. I invite you, Mr. Chairman, and the Members of the Committee to visit the Miami-Dade County Emergency Operations Center. As in the past, Miami-Dade County is ready to assist in enhancing overall preparedness efforts. My colleagues and I welcome any questions at this time.



Miami-Dade County, Florida

Carlos Alvarez, *Mayor*

Board of County Commissioners

Joe A. Martinez, *Chairperson*

Dennis C. Moss, *Vice-Chairperson*

Barbara J. Jordan	<i>District 1</i>
Dorrian D. Rolle	<i>District 2</i>
Barbara Carey-Shuler, Ed.D.	<i>District 3</i>
Sally A. Heyman	<i>District 4</i>
Bruno A. Barreiro	<i>District 5</i>
Rebeca Sosa	<i>District 6</i>
Carlos A. Gimenez	<i>District 7</i>
Katy Sorenson	<i>District 8</i>
Dennis C. Moss	<i>District 9</i>
Sen. Javier D. Souto	<i>District 10</i>
Joe A. Martinez	<i>District 11</i>
José "Pepe" Diaz	<i>District 12</i>
Natacha Seijas	<i>District 13</i>

Harvey Ruvin, *Clerk of the Circuit and County Courts*

George M. Burgess, *County Manager*

Murray Greenberg, *County Attorney*

www.miamidade.gov